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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0163
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0400
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0332
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1688
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0404
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1206
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000998

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2016

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL OSCE TX

SUBJECT: MYRADOVA CASE: HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPOSITION PRESS
SPIN CAUSE OF DEATH

REF: A. ASHGABAT 0987

1B. ASHGABAT 0983

1C. BRUSH-PERRY SEPTEMBER 14 TELCON AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jennifer L. Brush for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) A week after the death in prison of Turkmenistan journalist Ogulsapar Myradova, the authorities have not issued an autopsy, and one is not expected for at least another week. Embassy officers have not talked with any members of Myradova's family since September 15, and there are no signs of the family at their home. Most foreign governments have hewn to a position calling on the Government of Turkmenistan to make a full and impartial investigation, but in the absence of any reliable information, opposition and human rights groups have continued to spin the news, issuing increasingly sensational reports of Myradova's injuries. Reporters from non-state-run media attending a reception September 19 at the Charge's residence were aware of Myradova's death, and reacted with shock, fear and/or muted anger. Meanwhile, Ashgabat-based RFE/RL reporter Halmyrat Gylychdurdyev has reported that authorities are using threats against family members to try to force him and Mary-based RFE/RL reporter Meretmuhammet Hommadov to renounce their RFE/RL contracts. End Summary.

International Community Continues to Push for Investigation

12. (C) One week after the death in prison of previously little-known journalist Ogulsapar Myradova first became public, the authorities in Turkmenistan have not issued an autopsy report, as far as we are aware. In the absence of any reliable information, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the U.S., French and British governments continue to focus on calling for Turkmenistan to conduct a full and impartial investigation into the cause of Myradova's death and to make public those

results. In an exchange during the September 21 meeting of the OSCE's Permanent Council in Vienna, Turkmenistan's Ambassador to the OSCE made a rare public statement defending Turkmenistan's actions along the lines used by Foreign Minister Meredov with OSCE Center Ambassador Djikic on September 16 (ref a), i.e., that Myradova was not an accredited journalist and that her case had been handled in full compliance with Turkmenistan's law. The UK Ambassador told Charge September 21 that the EU was contemplating writing a note of condolence to Myradova's family, which it might ask U.S. embassy officers (the only members of the international diplomatic community who know where Myradova's children live) to deliver.

Myradova's Family Whereabouts Unknown

¶ 13. (C) Embassy officers attempted September 22 to call on Myradova's family in order to deliver a letter of condolence from the Charge and to inquire after the family's welfare. Nobody answered the door, and officers could not hear anybody inside. Embassy officers also saw no signs of a security presence around the residence.

Opposition and Human Rights Groups Spinning News

¶ 14. (C) Some international human rights groups, Turkmenistan's overseas opposition groups and the western media have been busy spinning -- and, as already reported refs b and c, not always accurately -- Myradova's death and the government's treatment of Myradova's family members in the absence of concrete information. For example, a

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September 21 report by the German Press Agency (Deutsche Presse Agentur -- DPA), citing a report by Reporters without Borders on an investigation supposedly carried out by German radio station Deutsche Welle, claimed that the police autopsy had revealed a large head wound as well as internal bleeding in the liver and left kidney. The DPA report also claimed that Myradova had died at least four days before her death was made known on September 14. (Note: We are aware of at least two other stories in which Deutsche Welle reports have been totally unreliable. End Note.) Central Asia News claimed September 20 that Myradova's family was not allowed to see the journalist's body and were only given the body for burial following the intervention of diplomats and the OSCE mission. A news website, www.followthemedia.com, claimed on September 18 that Myradova had head trauma caused by an axe and strangulation.

Local Media Respond with Shock and Fear

¶ 15. (C) It became clear at the Charge's media reception on September 19 that news of Myradova's death had reached Turkmenistan's reporters. Attendance at the event was low and consisted only of journalists not affiliated with state-run media. (Note: Government surveillance of the reception reportedly was extremely heavy. End Note.) Most guests expressed (in varying amounts) shock, fear, sorrow and muted anger. Although embassy officers did not meet anybody who claimed to know Myradova as an active journalist, it was clear that Myradova's fate -- and the recognition that the same thing could happen to any citizen of Turkmenistan -- was very much on everybody's mind. A report issued September 21 by Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights played up the event, claiming that the Charge had been placed in danger by hosting the event. Embassy learned that representatives of state-run media, though they been permitted to attend the two prior media receptions welcoming Public Affairs Officers, were not permitted to attend the September 19 reception.

New Government Offensive Against RFE/RL Reporters?

¶6. (C) Ashgabat-based RFE/RL reporter Halmyrat Gylychdurdyev separately told embassy officers this week that authorities had stepped up efforts to silence Gylychdurdyev and Mary-based RFE/RL reporter Meretmuhammet Hommadov. In Gylychdurdyev's case, the authorities are threatening to force his 33 year-old son, who so far has successfully avoided conscription, to serve in Turkmenistan's military unless Gylychdurdyev signs a statement promising to cease working for RFE/RL. (Note: The ceiling for conscription under Turkmenistan's law is 30; we understand that Turkmenistan's law also exempts only sons of pensioners -- like Gylychdurdyev -- from serving, but Gylychdurdyev's son may not be covered by these laws if he did not use legal means to avoid conscription. End Note.) Hommadov is being told that his son, who was arrested three months ago for a crime committed five years ago, would be released if he signed a similar agreement.

Comment

¶7. (C) While the consistent message from EU, OSCE, the United States and other international missions and organizations has been helpful up to now in dampening most media speculation, we suspect that human rights and opposition organizations will become increasingly more lurid until more authoritative reports about Myradova's injuries are issued. We have no plans to issue any statements here, but leave to the Department's discretion the advisability of revising existing press guidance to reflect what we do know about her injuries, based on personal viewing and photos taken by embassy officers, e.g., there were no signs of strangulation. End Comment.

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